



Editorial

“You cannot step into the same river twice”, – what does it mean for us today?

Elena Stepanova

Institute for Philosophy and Law, Ural Branch, the Russian Academy of Sciences

The world in which we live is undergoing rapid transformations across all societal systems, affecting such spheres as economy, technology, politics and culture. Undeniably, these processes in turn reshape human values, morals and religious beliefs. Individual and collective identities cannot be static; rather, they are subject to various evolutionary influences. Among the factors that pertain to identity change are global and regional pressures, post-industrial technological developments, migration issues, political challenges, as well as the changing role played by religion in post-secular societies. Indeed, societies and individuals are varying constantly; therefore, identification of the forces driving these changes becomes one of the main concerns of modern intellectual history. Theories and methodologies aimed at understanding the direction and mechanisms behind social change have differed dramatically since the emergence of the social sciences. A teleological approach towards history – and the notion of progress as the continuous improvement of society – was embedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition, whose concept strongly influenced social and political philosophy during the Enlightenment period and inspired the writings of influential 19th and early 20th century social thinkers, from August Comte to Émile Durkheim. In the classical period of the development of the social sciences, social dynamics was understood in terms of either evolution or revolution and seen as a predictable and irreversible process, along which societies moved from a primitive to a complex developmental stage.

The major intellectual insight of the first part of the 20th century concerned the essence, structure and functions of modern society.

Theories of modernization, which treated the latter as being an inevitable stage through which all societies should pass in the progress of humankind, declared the “Western” way of social development to be an authentic pattern for the rest of the world to follow. Nevertheless, towards the end of the 20th century, such historical events as the explosion of the new Asian economies, the decolonization of most African nations, the collapse of socialist ideologies, the rise of Islamism and other concepts alternative to western liberal democracy revealed the limits of existing social theories and methodologies as derived from the Western experience of modernization. This theory of modernization was challenged by the contrary idea that there are in fact multiple models for development which modern societies may follow and that their choice is determined by a particular cultural-historical context; as a result, conventional social research dichotomies between “modern and traditional”, “highly-developed, less-developed and under-developed”, “civilized and uncivilized”, “Eastern and Western”, “the South and the North” have lost their distinctiveness and validity.

Today, the linear view of historical progress is giving way to non-linearity and contingency and the teleology of the development of a society starting from a lower stage and progressing to a higher one has been largely discarded. As Zygmunt Bauman, the author of the famous metaphor depicting modernity as a “liquid”, underlines, the main feature of the contemporary phase in the history of humankind is the “non-directedness of changes”. Such changes seem to become more and more random and unpredictable; therefore, the futurological utopian genre has lost all of its credibility. According to Bauman, we now find ourselves in the period of an “interregnum”: one in which the old ways no longer work, but for which the new ways have not yet been established. It may seem that it is not just that one cannot step twice into the same river, as the ancient Greek sophist Cratylus said in his going beyond Heraclitus, but instead it is that one cannot step into the same river even once. According to this logic, it is not possible to elaborate a solid definition of the manifestations of liquid sociality;

likewise, it is not possible to distinguish between true and false social theories because all social change is eternal and any theory will soon be superseded by another even before the first has been verbalized. Fortunately, the vast majority of researchers consider such extremist relativism as counter-productive. We are bound to continue in our endeavours to reveal the internal logic of social reality and to determine its causes and effects. At the same time, changing societies and transmuting personalities require us to employ flexible theories and methodologies when studying highly diverse historical experiences, social patterns, political institutions and cultures. Changing societies and personalities are in need of new approaches both in the humanities and social sciences; these should include an analysis of both macro-social and micro-social forces operating in particular socio-cultural contexts, as well as a study of the interconnection between global and local communities, and the mutual influence of national societies and individual identities.

Today, the main concern of the social sciences is not so much in elaborating new concepts, but rather in describing the state of things as they are, and reflecting upon their essence and meaning. Social scientists should not strive to be the “bearers of truth”, but rather should seek to act as observers, who occupy meta-positions above the fray. Such a position neither presupposes the researcher to be completely independent of his or her own context, nor does it exclude his or her intellectual priorities; at the same time, it does not imply adopting a post-modernist point of view, according to which every person is imprisoned inside his or her subjective world. At the same time, an observer should not, when carrying out a study, pretend to be wholly impersonal and objective. On the contrary, the researcher should freely describe his or her own propensities, preferences, understandings and attitudes towards historical, cultural and political problems, while at the same time being self-reflective and aware of such propensities. This means that the researcher will free him- or herself from any particular concept or school of thought; as a result the research will remain diverse, new and fresh. The only limitation the observer should obey concerns the very subject of research in its dynamics. The flexibility, broadness and malleability of the social sciences and humanities are defined by the

overall aim of the research – which is to elaborate new ways of living together in order to reconcile the needs of people belonging to different cultural, racial, ethnical, ethical and religious backgrounds.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, it is my honour to introduce the first issue of “Changing Societies & Personalities” (CS&P) – an international, peer-reviewed quarterly journal, published in English by the Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russia. This journal strives to become a forum for discussion and reflection informed by the results of relevant research into societal and personal transformations in different spheres. The journal will promote networking between researchers, enabling them to share their ideas, insights, methodologies and concerns about the past, present and future of societies and personalities. The aim of this journal is two-fold: firstly, to study social and individual transformations and their interconnection in history and in the present day; secondly, to reflect upon the approaches, theories, ideas and methods of the social sciences and humanities in studying changing societies and personalities.

The journal wishes to stimulate a creative and mutually beneficial exchange of ideas between scholars from different countries and cultural backgrounds, taking into account national specificities in terms of the theoretical and methodological approaches applied. We welcome interdisciplinary approaches to academic research and writing, since social changes and personal transformations cannot be fully understood from the perspective of any single social science or humanities discipline; nor can it be comprehended within the bounds of a single academic discipline. Culture, morality, religion, ethnicity, class, age and gender are among those points of scientific interest influencing choices of which research projects to pursue, as well as which methods and theoretical frameworks to apply. However, the interdisciplinary approach does not imply an erosion of academic requirements; the interdisciplinary approach to research should be grounded in a thorough knowledge of specific trends, theories and methodologies in the social sciences and humanities.

CS&P examines how rapid societal-level changes are reshaping individual-level beliefs, motivations and values – and how these individual-level changes in turn are reshaping societies. The journal welcomes

theoretical and empirical contributions from a wide range of perspectives in the context of value pluralism and social heterogeneity in postmodern societies. The themes of the journal include but are not limited to: value implications of interactions between socio-political transformations and personal self-identity; changes in value orientations; materialist and post-materialist values; moral reasoning and behaviour; variability and continuity in the election of styles of moral regime and/or religious identity; the moral bases of political preferences and their elimination; social exclusion and inclusion; post-secular religious individualism; meanings, varieties and fundamentals of tolerance or merely 'tolerating'; ideologies of gender and age as variables in political, moral, religious and social change; educational strategies as training for specific social competences; social and existential security. The journal publishes original research articles, forum discussions, interviews, conference proceedings, review articles and book reviews.

The papers included into the current issue are linked to the general theme of continuity and alteration of value systems.

In the interview entitled "There is a crucial need for competent social scientists...", Ronald Inglehart stresses the importance of the social sciences in analysing the main controversies of the contemporary world such as growing income inequality and the replacement of industrial society by the knowledge society. Speaking about ethnic, religious, racial conflicts, and xenophobia, Inglehart argues that the reasons for conflicts decline systematically as people become more secure. Consequently, over time, people living in advanced industrial societies have become more tolerant towards diversity and less violent towards others. Underlying the validity of religion as a source of the meaning of life, as well as pointing out the failure of the theory of secularization, Inglehart determines religion as an expression of the basic human need for predictability and a distinction between right and wrong.

In the paper "Beyond the Freakonomics of Religious Liberty", Ivan Strenski describes his experience with religious freedom in Armenia and points out the difference between the Western and Eastern approaches: if in the West the values governing religious freedom are analogous to the values governing economic markets, in the East

this may not be the case due to a different socio-cultural atmosphere. Strenski argues that it might be better to think about religious liberty using models embodying other kinds of values than those dominating the thinking of citizens of Western societies. He refers to Western values in terms of a “market” model, which presupposes a free choice of beliefs, ideas and values, of association and companionship, as well as implying a market place for spiritual goods and services in which no one is permitted an advantage over any other buyer or seller. Consequently, all religions ought to expect to compete equally and fairly for adherents.

Strenski distinguishes two possible reasons why the leading religious confession in Armenia – the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church (HAAC) – is so determined to resist the Western model of the freedom of religion: firstly, after 70 years of the Soviet system hostility towards religion, the HAAC is not ready for a free religious market in the country; and secondly, it feels it should remain in a privileged position because of its historical role in preserving both Armenian nationality and local Christianity throughout the Soviet period of active persecution of religion. On the other hand, new Protestant churches in Armenia see HAAC as the representation of a traditionalist religious monopoly that seeks to maintain its hegemony and restrict the religious choices of Armenians. Using the Armenian context, Strenski raises the question of whether it is always in the best interests of people to assert their right to religious liberty and whether the Western understanding of a free religious market has its natural limits when applied to former Soviet countries with their traditional religions, as well as to Greece and Turkey. The paper invites discussion on the possibility and potential necessity of an alternative model to the religious liberty market model, taking into account the unique socio-historical peculiarities and contemporary context of the given country, and so raises a question as to the optimal relation between religions in post-Soviet states.

The main topic of Tim Jensen’s paper “Religious Education: Meeting and Countering Changes, – Changing and Standing Still” is the challenges that religious education (RE) faces in public schools in European countries due to increased religious pluralism and

individualism. Jensen stresses the importance of RE since it is this education that is supposed to play a key role in paving the way for tolerance, social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, human rights and freedom of religion. In addition, RE is expected to function as an antidote to what is seen as a growing fragmentation, as well as a lack of spiritual and moral orientation. Jensen underlines the advantages and shortcomings of the confessional and non-confessional types of RE in the light of transnational EU recommendations and academic discussions being held on the issue.

Using the Scandinavian example, Jensen reveals the ambiguity of the “religious dimension” of culture, which he acknowledges as the “crypto-confessional” approach in RE. As a result, in most European countries, other religions besides Christianity are still seen only from the point of view of the established “confession” or religion. Jensen also observes the “citizenship education” as an alternative/substitute for RE. The paper seeks answers to basic questions of RE: whether RE is the study of beliefs and values of oneself and others or a way to develop pupils’ basic beliefs, values and identities; whether RE is merely a way to provide pupils with information about religions or a way to inspire religious faith in those pupils.

Nikolay Skvortsov’s paper “The Formation of National Identity in Contemporary Russia” explores the complex issue of the search for national identity in post-Soviet Russia. He raises questions as to why problems of nation and national identity are arising now, stressing the fact that their topicality is connected both with internal and external challenges faced by contemporary Russia, as well as concerning the need to strengthen the multi-ethnic Russian state in order to mitigate negative developments in the sphere of international relations and prevent ethnic conflicts. Referring to the definitions of the nation referred to in Soviet social science, Skvortsov underlines that the Soviet model of the nation is based on ethnic nationalism as opposed to an understanding of the nation as a discrete political and territorial entity. Thus, the author warns against possible dangers arising out of the tradition of interpreting the nation only in ethnic terms. He concludes that the integrated, multi-level structure of the Russian national identity determines the complexity of

its formation in people's minds. In solving this task, it is necessary for various social institutions to be involved – the family, the government, the educational system, mass media and others.

In the current issue of the journal, two book reviews are published. Andrey Menshikov offers the reader a commentary on Carlo Invernizzi Accetti's *Relativism and Religion: Why Democratic Societies Do Not Need Moral Absolutes* (Columbia University Press, 2015). In this review, Menshikov highlights two interrelated topics of the book: the first being a historical analysis of how the concept of relativism has become so prominent in Catholic political theory; the second being an analytical study of the contradictions inherent in the idea that democratic regimes need to be complemented by a set of absolute moral or political truths in order to avoid degenerating into a form of totalitarianism. The analysis of relativism and religion, as described by Menshikov, is based on a comparison of the secular relativist concept of freedom and the Catholic Church's notion of freedom, which relies on an acceptance of man's creation in the image of God.

Elena Trubina offers the reader a review of *The Unhappy Divorce of Sociology and Psychoanalysis: Diverse Perspectives on the Psychosocial* (Lynn Chancer, John Andrews, eds., Springer, 2014). In her review, the author underlines the increased alienation between the disciplines of sociology and psychology in the 20th century and highlights the important work done by scholars of the 21st century in a book in which the failure of two disciplines to engage in a productive dialogue is exhaustively analysed. From Trubina's standpoint, the reviewed work demonstrates examples of a disconnect between the two disciplines of sociology and psychology, while leaving open a possibility for their reconciliation.

We welcome thoughts from readers and prospective authors, and invite them to send us their reflections and ideas!

For more information, please visit the journal web-site: <https://changing-sp.com/>